

Sergio Osmeña
PRESIDENT OF THE PHILIPPINES

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THE career of Sergio Osmeña, President of the Philippines, has closely paralleled that of Manuel L. Quezon, the man he succeeded in office. They were born in the same year; they had much the same social and educational background; they both studied at the University of Santo Tomas, where they were roommates and classmates. They commenced their public careers at the same time in their native provinces. Both were provincial governors; both were elected to the first Philippine Assembly; both continuously held public office until the establishment of the Commonwealth Government in 1935, when they were elected to the highest offices in the land—Quezon as President and Osmeña as Vice-President.

An apostle of Philippine-American collaboration—a role he has played since the early days of the American regime, as governor of Cebu, as speaker of the Philippine Assembly, and later as Vice-President of the Philippines—Sergio Osmeña assumes the presidency of the Philippines at a very opportune time.

Sergio Osmeña was born September 9, 1878, in the island of Cebu, one of the central islands in the Philippine archipelago. He studied at the San Carlos Seminary in Cebu, and in 1894 entered Santo Tomas University in Manila, where he studied for two years.

BEGINS PUBLIC CAREER AS A JOURNALIST

During the troubled period between 1896 and 1902, Osmeña was first a newspaper writer and then publisher of a newspaper in Cebu. In 1903, he was admitted to the Bar in Manila and returned to Cebu to practice. In 1904, he became provincial *fiscal* (prosecuting attorney) of Cebu, and in 1906, he was elected provincial governor.

When Osmeña took office, there was considerable disorder in the province of Cebu. The effect of the dislocations and disturbances of the years of insurrection was still felt, and serious crop failures contributed to the unrest. However, Osmeña was able to restore order—"a situation that has not before existed within the memory of living people," according to the report of the Philippine Commission.

From the beginning, Osmeña advocated the eventual independence of the Philippines. In 1902, he was a member of a group which petitioned Governor-General Taft for permission to form a political party advocating independence. At that time, the United States civil authorities opposed the formation of independence parties, and permission was refused. In 1906, when the first Convention of Provincial Governors was held in Manila, Osmeña was one of the small group of five governors who openly urged eventually independence. Nevertheless, although he belonged to the minority group, he was elected President of the Convention.

BECOMES SPEAKER OF THE ASSEMBLY

When the restriction against pro-independence parties was lifted preceding the elections for the first Philippine Assembly in 1907, Osmeña and other leaders formed the Nacionalista Party, which elected an overwhelming majority of the members of the new body. Osmeña was elected Speaker of the Assembly.

Under Osmeña's leadership, the Assembly avoided the two major pitfalls before it—too docilely following the cue of the American officials, or adopting purely obstructionist tactics—and became a responsible and effective legislative body. It adopted almost entirely the parliamentary rules of the Fifty-ninth Congress of the United States; in two respects it actually anticipated important reforms in the rules of the American Congress. It provided for one Appropriation Committee of twenty-five members, most of whom were chairmen of other committees. The Congress of the United States did not adopt this procedure until fifteen years later, as part of the reforms made in establishing a budget system. The second important deviation was in relation to the composition of the powerful committee on rules. While in the United States at that time, the Speaker was the chairman of the committee on rules, Speaker Osmeña never made use of this great prerogative, the chairmanship of that committee having been held all the time by another member of the Assembly. This matter was also followed by the U. S. House of Representatives some time later.

Osmeña was Speaker of the Assembly during the nine years of its existence. In 1916, the Congress of the United States passed the Jones Act, which started specifically the intention of the United States to give the islands eventual independence, gave the nation a greater measure of self-government, and provided for the election of a Senate composed of Filipinos. Osmeña decided to remain in the lower house—renamed the House of Representatives—and was Speaker of that body until 1922.

The influence which Osmeña wielded in the government of the Philippines during the period of his speakership—1907 to 1922—was far greater than that of any American Speaker. In power and prestige, he was actually second only to the Governor General who was appointed by the President of the United States; and he was able to obtain for the Filipinos an ever-increasing share in the conduct of the government of the Islands. Three factors contributed to this: first, his official position as Speaker of the lower house; second, and more important, his position as the leader of the overwhelmingly dominant political party; and third, his own persuasive personality. The American Governors-General respected him and the other leaders of his party, and consulted him not only concerning necessary legislation,

but also the administration of the executive departments. In 1918, Governor General Francis B. Harrison formalized this arrangement between the American executive branch of the Government and the Filipino legislature by creating a Council of State, of which he was Chairman and Osmeña was Vice-Chairman. This Council actually performed the functions of a cabinet.

SPLIT IN PARTY LEADERSHIP

In 1922, Osmeña and Quezon had a disagreement on the leadership question. While Osmeña maintained that for the effectiveness of the Filipino participation in the government a national leadership was a political necessity, Quezon, on the other hand, advocated collective leadership. This disagreement led to a split of the Nacionalista Party. However, Osmeña and Quezon remained close personal friends. In the same elections, Osmeña did not run for reelection in the House and, instead, presented his candidacy for the Senate and was elected Senator from Cebu, a position which he held until he was elected Vice-President of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935.

The differences between Osmeña and Quezon did not long continue. Osmeña and his followers supported Quezon in the legislature, and before the elections of 1925, the two factions reunited to form the Partido Nacionalista-Consolidado, of which Quezon was leader. Osmeña was by no means forced into political obscurity. He became President pro tempore of the Senate of which Quezon was President. In 1924, he was a member of the Third Philippine Mission to the United States; in 1925, he was special envoy of the Philippine Legislature to the United States and delegate of the Philippine Group to the thirty-third Interparliamentary Conference held in Washington, D. C.; in 1927, he was a member of a committee designated by the Philippine Legislature to confer with the President of the United States.

HEADS INDEPENDENCE MISSION

In 1931, Osmeña and Speaker Manuel Roxas were chosen to head the Ninth Independence Mission to the United States. This Mission remained in Washington for almost two years, and was able to secure the passage by the American Congress of the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act which is the forerunner of the Philippine Independence Act.

The Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act provoked a violent political upheaval in the Philippines. Senate President Quezon and many other leaders seriously objected to certain provisions of the act which the Mission secured. The act provided that it should not take effect unless approved by the Philippine Legislature or a convention of the Filipino people. Quezon immediately set about to defeat the acceptance of the act; Osmeña and the other members of the Ninth Independence Mission sought to obtain its approval. All the old party lines were obliterated in the fight over the Hare-Hawes-Cutting Act. In the end Quezon and those opposed to the act won over-

whelmingly, and on October 17, 1933, the Philippine Legislature rejected the act.

The political schism between Osmeña and Quezon did not last long. When Quezon secured the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in 1934, which also required the assent of the legislature before becoming effective, Osmeña supported its acceptance. Neither Osmeña nor Quezon were candidates for members of the Constitutional Convention. However, the great majority of the members of the Convention were followers of one or the other. Nevertheless, the differences were not carried into the Constitutional Convention.

QUEZON AND OSMENA TEAM UP

The constitution was drafted and approved by the Filipino people and by the President of the United States and the country made ready to elect its first President and Vice-President under the Commonwealth Government. The nation was on its way to complete independence in an unsettled and difficult world. The new government needed all its wise and able leaders—it could spare none of them. So instead of engaging in a spectacular political battle, Osmeña and Quezon soberly considered the best interests of their country and agreed to bury their temporary differences. They became candidates on a coalition ticket. This reconciliation was much more than a political truce dictated by expediency; it was an actual agreement between the two great Filipino leaders to work together for the good of their country. About two years after the elections of 1935, they merged their parties, and in 1941, they were reelected on a single party ticket—the Partido Nacionalista.

From the beginning, the Vice-Presidency of the Philippines has meant heavy responsibilities. Osmeña was appointed Secretary of Public Instruction, a post which has always been ranked as one of the most important in the Philippine Cabinet. In 1939, President Quezon chose Vice-President Osmeña to head a mission to Washington which obtained important amendments to the Tydings-McDuffie Act.

OSMENA IN CORREGIDOR

On December 24, 1941, President Quezon and Vice-President Osmeña and the members of the War Cabinet were forced to leave Manila for Corregidor. The second inauguration of the President and the Vice-President took place there on December 30, 1941. On Corregidor, Vice-President Osmeña was in charge of the destruction of the Philippine paper currency for the Philippine Government, and superintended the loading of the Philippines gold reserve on the submarine which brought it to the United States.

On February 20, the Vice-President left Corregidor with President Quezon, and shared in the hazardous journey, first to Cebu, thence to Mindanao and Australia, and finally to the United States.

OSMEÑA IN WASHINGTON

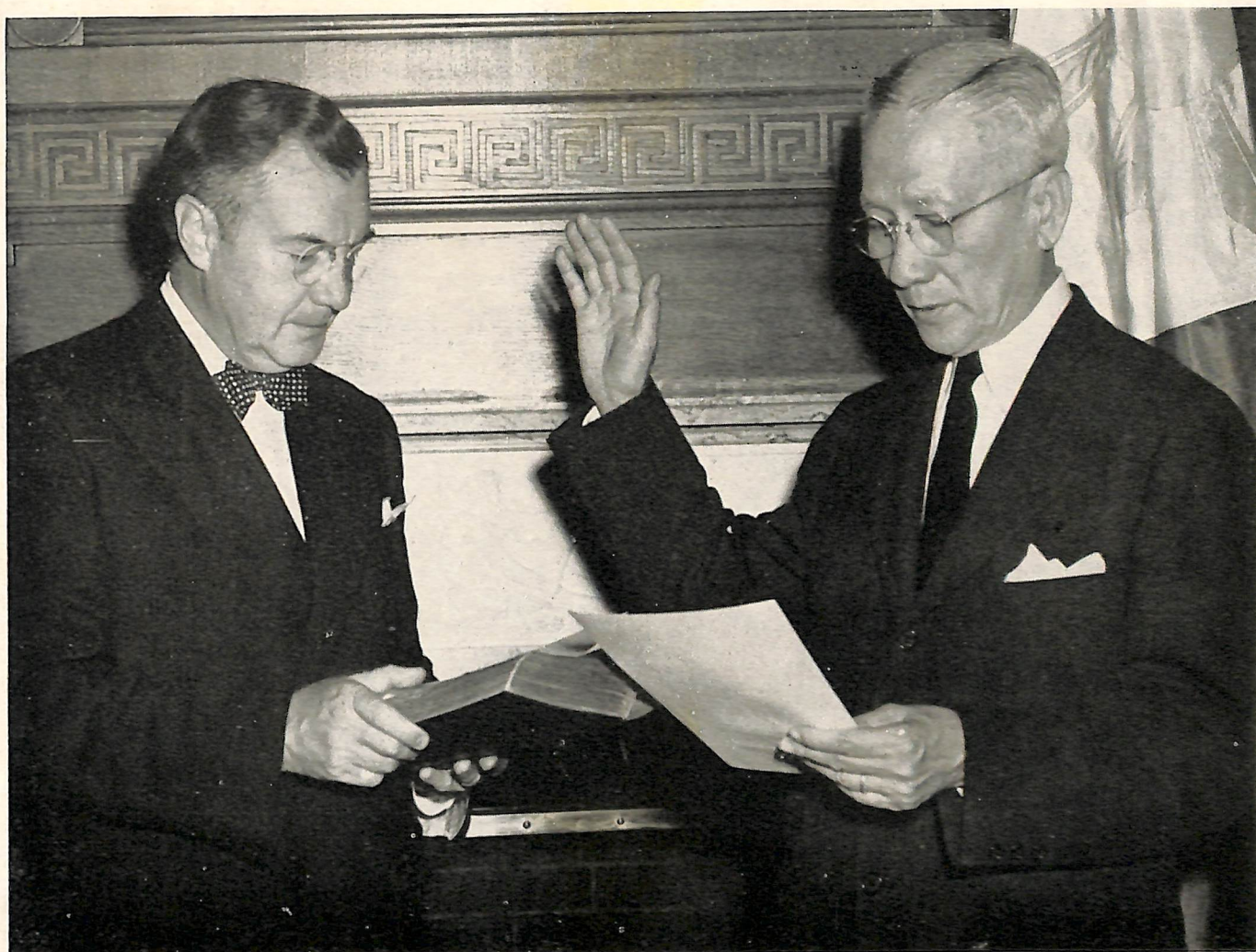
In Washington, the Vice-President carried a large share of the duties of the Philippine Government-in-exile. He attended the meetings of the Pacific War Council in the absence of the President; on September 15, he was appointed by the President Chairman of the Post-War Planning Board which has the vital task of planning for the post-war economic rehabilitation and military security of the Philippines. On behalf of the Philippines he signed the agreement of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration at the White House on November 9th.

In the elections of November 11, 1941, it was generally understood that when President Quezon's term of office expired on November 15, 1943, Vice-President Osmeña would succeed him. The war situation, however, raised the problem of whether it would be wise to change leadership. Osmeña, instead of asserting his undoubted right under the Constitution, agreed to the consideration of the matter, not only on purely legal grounds but also on political grounds arising from the necessities of the

war. Consequently, upon Osmeña's initiative, the Commonwealth Government submitted the matter to Congress for consideration and action. Congress passed a joint resolution continuing President Quezon in office for the duration of the war and Osmeña readily accepted this decision and made an appeal to his countrymen in these words:

"Congress, after thorough consideration, passed the joint resolution providing for the continuance in office of President Quezon for the duration of the war. This resolution expresses the considered judgment of the American people. I accept it without reserve and I urge every Filipino, whether in the homeland, in continental United States, in Hawaii or anywhere else, to accept this congressional action which is intended to safeguard the best interests of the two peoples."

On August 1, 1944, the same day Manuel L. Quezon died in Saranac Lake, New York, Sergio Osmeña took his oath of office in Washington, D. C., as President of the Philippines.



Sergio Osmeña taking his oath of office as President of the Philippines before Associate Justice Robert H. Jackson of the U. S. Supreme Court